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On the Beat

Minneapolis VA
Health Care System

May 2014





"On the Beat" is published monthly for patients, employees, volunteers and friends of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

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VA's Second Tech Dump A Collective Success

Minneapolis VA staff members turned out to celebrate Earth Day a few days early in the second annual "Tech Dump" on April 17.

Two gaylords (bulk box) were collected, with 7,662 pounds collected for recycling. About 20% of the poundage consisted of computers and about 24% old CRT/tube TVs and monitors. The event was organized by Minneapolis VA GEMS coordinator George Johnson. According to TechDump, which collected the items, the collection effort will result in one month of work for an adult with barriers to employment.



Reaching Out Via Minnesota Military Radio

Minneapolis VA is featured twice a month on Minnesota Military Radio, which is carried on 20 commercial radio stations. Director Patrick Kelly provides a monthly 5-minute "VA Update." Also, a VA subject matter expert appears once a month to discuss a VA program or topic. For program details, see: <http://minnesotamilitaryradiohour.com/>. Minneapolis VA staff who have appeared this year: Mark Frenzel, who discussed OEF/OIF programs; Dr. Melissa Polusny, who discussed the VA collaboration with the MN National Guard; Jonelle Glubke, who discussed VA homeless program; and Dr. Brian Engdahl and Dr. Apostolos Georgopoulos, who discussed the Brain Sciences Center. Scheduled to appear in coming months are Dr. Erin Krebs to discuss women's health; Dr. Clyde Markon to discuss CBOCs and Martina Bucci to discuss the VA prosthetics service.

Study Finds 1 in 4 Veterans from the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars Don't Have Consistent Access to Sufficient Food



Dr. Widome

Men and women who served in the U.S. military during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are far more likely to have difficulties accessing sufficient food than the average American citizen, found new research from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

Findings from the study indicate limited or uncertain access to adequate food is a prevalent problem among the newest U.S. veterans, a previously unknown facet of the financial hardships affecting veterans.

The study, led by University of Minnesota researcher **Rachel Widome, Ph.D.**, in collaboration with Minneapolis Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System researchers **Agnes Jensen, B.S., Steven S. Fu, M.D., and Ann Bangerter, B.S.**, was published online on May 7 in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*. Media covering the study included Minnesota Public Radio, HealthDay, Stars and Stripes, the Military Times and Minneapolis Star Tribune.

Researchers surveyed 922 veterans, drawn from VA records, who had at least one outpatient visit at the Minneapolis VA and who served in Iraq or Afghanistan since October 2001.

“We found that 27 percent of veterans who served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan don’t have consistent access to sufficient food,” said Widome, who is also a collaborator with VA’S Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research. “That’s drastically higher than the prevalence of food insecurity in the U.S., which is 14.5 percent.”

The study also found veterans are more likely to be food insecure if they:

- Are young, report poor general health, are not married/partnered or not employed/on active duty
- Have lower income, reported a lower final military pay grade, or live with children

Furthermore, the study findings indicate food insecure veterans are more likely to use tobacco, binge drink frequently, and sleep less each night than veterans who get enough food.

“Our findings suggest food insecure veterans face multiple serious threats to their wellbeing,” said Widome.

According to the authors, the overarching message was that food insecurity is a surprisingly big problem among veterans, a problem that should be addressed. “We hope this research prompts discussion on how to help veterans currently struggling to access food,” said Widome.

Story from University of Minnesota News Release and press reports

Big Time Welcome for New Albert Lea VA Clinic; Civic Leaders, VA Officials and Veterans Celebrate



US Congressman Tim Walz delivers keynote address at the ceremonial opening of Albert Lea VA Clinic



More than 400 people turned out for the April 25 “grand opening” of the VA’s newest outpatient clinic in Albert Lea, MN.

Clyde Markon, MD, medical director of the Minneapolis VA’s network of outpatient clinics, recalled passing through the community after returning from combat duty in Afghanistan a few years ago.

“I remember seeing the signs that said, ‘Welcome Home, Troops,’ he said. “When they say they support their Veterans, they mean it.”

Albert Lea American Legion and VFW Honor Guard open ceremony



Traditional ribbon cutting by Chamber, Civic Leaders, Valor Reps and VA Officials. Rep. Walz with scissors.

The clinic is managed under a contract with Valor, part of the Humana Government Business. It is located in the Skyline Plaza, located on the southside of the city.

The master of ceremonies was Minneapolis VA director **Patrick Kelly**. The keynote speaker was U.S. Rep. Tim Walz, D-1st District and 24 year veteran of the Army National Guard. "The community has stood by our Veterans time and time again," he said. "This is your clinic. You deserve it."

The clinic offers primary care, mental health counseling and podiatry services. The staff includes a social worker and dietician. The clinic provides a lab and imaging services, with several telecommunication rooms where patients can also communicate with doctors at the Minneapolis VA.

Scott Wise, chief operating officer with Valor, a subsidiary of Humana Government Business, said the clinic features highly trained staff who take their jobs seriously. He said the people who were hired to work at the clinic could have worked anywhere in the community but chose to work where they could take care of Veterans.

Albert Lea Mayor **Vern Rasmussen** urged local residents to make Veterans feel welcome and comfortable in the community. He said he looks forward to making Albert Lea a second home for veterans from out of town. Also speaking were **Dr. Steven Julius**, VISN23 chief medical officer, and **Chris Schoff**, Freeborn County Commission Chairman and **Ron Reule**, Freeborn County Veteran Service Officer.



SOCIAL WORKERS CELEBRATE - 70 Minneapolis VA social workers gathered March 18 in the IRM Atrium to celebrate Social Work Month. The MVAHCS currently employs more than 120 social workers who work in the Medical Center, Community Resource and Referral Center and CBOCS.

Milestones—Congratulations

35 YEARS

Carole Smith
Primary Care
Donald Stoopes
Engineering
Estherline Comby
ECR

30 YEARS

Renee Burke
Lab Medicine

25 YEARS

Beatrice Platzer
ECR

Dewayne Shutes
Health & Safety

Leann Stomberg
Fiscal Services

Carolyn Davis
Nursing Service

Diane Ekwochi
Specialty Care

Jane Keel
Imaging

Mark Willy
Health & Safety

Sheri Lechner
PrimaryCare

20 YEARS

Michelle Frazer-
Rodriguez
Primary Care

Melanie Benter
Specialty Care

Shannon Amundson
Imaging

Herbert Campbell
Materials Mgmt

Vassyl Lonchyna
Primary Care

Lori Allert
Primary Care

15 YEARS

Leroy Fondren
Primary Care

Beatrice Morris
Mental Health

Rachel McGuire
Imaging

Mark Ford
HR

Susan Susienka
Primary Care

10 YEAR

Timothy Erickson, HR

Paul Hill, Business

Kathy Ziebell
Primary Care

Salima Mithani
Primary Care

Angela Bierdeman
Specialty Care

Tina Barnum, ECR

Lisa Moreno, Primary
Care

Billie Slater, Research

Kelly Rogalsky,
Primary Care

Brad Foley, Education

Diane McClaskie,
Business

Key US Senator Pays a Visit to Minneapolis VA



U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I, Vermont) visited the Minneapolis VA Medical Center on April 28 for a series of briefings with Minneapolis VA leadership and subject matter experts. Sanders, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, was in town for the weekend and made a stopover at the medical center before returning to Washington, DC. He was briefed on the

medical center's caregiver stipend program, dental services and alternative and complimentary medicine. During the meeting, Sanders expressed strong support for VA programs. He said the VA needs to do more to let veterans and the general public know that VA care surpasses the private sector in many areas. In photo below right, Sen. Sanders is pictured with Mike Dieperink, MD, head of the mental health patient service line during discussion with leadership. In photo below left, Sen. Sanders is pictured with Minneapolis VA director Patrick Kelly and VISN23 Director Janet Murphy.





Shakopee VA Clinic Grand Opening!

Monday, June 16, 2014

9 am - Noon

Program begins at 9 am, followed by
open house and tours.

Location: 1100 Shakopee Town Square

**All Veterans and members of
the general public are invited.**

Light refreshments will be served.

The Minneapolis VA's newest community-based
outpatient clinic will be managed by Valor Healthcare.



**Veterans
Crisis Line**



**1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1**



Patient Aligned Care Teams Improve Access



The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs) - VA's model for more personalized and accessible primary care delivery - is improving access to health care and Veteran satisfaction, according to data released April 30 by the VA.

Since its inception in 2010, the PACT program has transformed the way Veterans receive their care by offering a coordinated team approach squarely focused on Veterans'

wellness and disease prevention.

VA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, caring for approximately 5.3 million Veterans in primary care settings. Over the past two years, VA has bolstered its support to all medical centers to expand established PACTs. Teams are comprised of a provider, a Registered Nurse care manager, a clinical associate, and an administrative associate. Clinical pharmacists, social workers, nutritionists, and behavioral health staff support PACTs.

Since implementing PACTs, the number of primary care patients has increased 12 percent, and the number of encounters with Veterans has increased 50 percent mostly due to telehealth, telephone and group encounters. Communicating with health care professionals through secure electronic means has increased dramatically as well. Despite the increase of primary care patients, access to primary care has improved and continuity of care is better.

Additionally, approximately 65 percent of Veterans requesting a same day primary care appointment with their personal provider are accommodated and 78 percent of Veterans are able to see their own primary care provider for an appointment on the date they desire. Veteran access to primary care during extended hours (non-business hours) has increased 75 percent since January 2013.

Over 72 percent of all Veterans discharged from VA are contacted within two days to ensure they are following discharge instructions and check in on their condition. These critical post-discharge follow-ups are important to reducing readmissions.

Mental Health Integration is also a critical component of PACTs and the program's goal to provide coordinated care. Veterans now see mental health providers in the primary care setting. In just one year (FY12-FY13) using the PACTs model, mental health services offered in VA primary care clinics increased 18 percent.

Overall, PACTs program implementation has been associated with important utilization changes—fewer primary care patients are receiving care in urgent care settings (decreased 33 percent) and acute hospital admissions have decreased 12 percent due to improved care management and coordination from PACTs.

Article from VA Office of Media Relations News Release

Memorial Day 2014



Memorial Day Services Fort Snelling National Cemetery

Monday, May 26

Program: 10 a.m.
Music Begins at 9:30 a.m.

Open to Public
Parking Limited. Use Light Rail